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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: INDEPENDENT AND OPPOSITION MEDIA ASK TOUGH
QUESTIONS

REF: A. ASTANA 1616

[1](#)B. ASTANA 1509

[1](#)1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

[1](#)2. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Ambassador answered questions from independent and opposition journalists during a media roundtable in Almaty on September 14 (ref A). The lively group, pleased to have an opportunity to express their concerns to the Ambassador, peppered him with questions about Kazakhstan's upcoming Chairmanship-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and President Obama's views on Kazakhstan. END SUMMARY.

HOW WILL YOU ENFORCE OSCE COMMITMENTS?

[1](#)3. (SBU) After a long and fruitful exchange on media freedom in Kazakhstan (ref A), the Ambassador agreed to respond to four questions on-the-record. The eager editors immediately queried, "Four questions each?" When the Ambassador reaffirmed that he unfortunately only had time for four questions total before his next event, pandemonium ensued. All began to talk at once, vying for the chance to pose a question. Seizing her opportunity, Gulzhan Yergaliyeva of "Svoboda Slova" verbally muscled aside the others and launched into a long statement/harangue with at least four embedded questions: "What interests us most is the stance of your country -- and other OSCE member countries -- in relation to acute problems in Kazakhstan." She told the Ambassador that "the public is getting the impression that the West is not pressuring Kazakhstan as it did during the Bush administration," and asked what Congress, the Obama Administration and the State Department think about recent cases, "which violate Kazakhstan's OSCE commitments." Without pausing to allow the Ambassador to answer, Yergaliyeva continued, "What will the West do so that Kazakhstan meets all of its obligations as Chairman of the OSCE?"

[1](#)4. (SBU) The Ambassador replied, "Many complicated countries have been very successful OSCE Chairs, and I am optimistic that Kazakhstan will be successful." The Ambassador said the U.S. government continues to do the same work under the Obama Administration as under the Bush Presidency, although the tone, nuances, and style have changed. "President Obama believes the best way to bring change is by building strong partnerships. We don't hesitate to say very

honest words to each other," Ambassador Hoagland underscored, "but we also want to build a strong productive partnership with Kazakhstan, which, in the end, I think will benefit the people of Kazakhstan including those sitting around this table."

15. (SBU) One of the editors followed, "Are there any plans for President Obama to come to Kazakhstan?" Various other representatives, led by Taukina, interrupted before the Ambassador could begin to answer, "Why should he come to such a country? Wouldn't that be rewarding a country that violates the principles of the OSCE?" The Ambassador replied "it is not at all impossible that Obama would visit Kazakhstan, although it is not on his schedule at this time. I assure you that the President is very well aware of Kazakhstan and watches issues here on a very regular basis."

"REFUSE THEIR VISAS, PLEASE"

16. (SBU) Editor-in-Chief of "Taszhargan" Yermurat Bapi jumped in as soon as the Ambassador finished, "I would like to ask the State Department to prohibit the entry of certain Kazakhstani officials who contributed to the limitation of the freedom of speech in the country." Bapi listed a few key names, starting with the Chairman of the Committee for National Security (KNB) and several Parliamentarians, and then passed the Ambassador a hand-written list. Although he acknowledged the unlikelihood that the United States would prohibit the officials to visit, he announced his hope that the information reach the Kazakhstani government. When the Ambassador agreed to provide the information to Washington, other media representatives immediately clamored to add more names.

WORTH PAYING ATTENTION TO

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17. (SBU) Media representatives voiced palpable concerns about U.S. perceptions of Kazakhstan's domestic political situation. One representative asked, "What is Obama's impression of Kazakhstan? What is he worried about in relation to Kazakhstan's situation?" The Ambassador replied that President Obama is not "worried" about Kazakhstan, which Obama considers a strong Eurasian country, important in the region and for U.S. investors. The Ambassador reiterated that Kazakhstan plays a vital role in non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction -- an issue that is extremely important to President Obama and the United States. "Kazakhstan is a country with a strong, growing, and very well-educated middle class -- a country that is worth paying attention to," the Ambassador reminded the roundtable participants.

KAZAKHGATE AND THE PRESIDENCY-FOR-LIFE

18. (SBU) One of the editors returned to a favorite opposition media topic, asking, "What does President Obama think about the proposal of a lifetime presidency in Kazakhstan? And aren't you worried that he will follow President Nazarbayev's model?" The Ambassador responded, "First, I don't think President Obama would choose to be President for Life. But let's be very careful with facts, simply because no one has announced that the president of this country will in fact become president for life." Roslana Taukina of "Obshchestvenaya Positsia" followed up with the question, "Are you aware of the situation around the Kazakhgate trial? And can you comment on the fact that the judge has again postponed consideration of the case?" The Ambassador replied, "It is never a good idea to comment about trials that are still under way. The trial continues to be postponed -- not for ideological or political reasons. But to say more than that would not be very wise on my part."

THEY COULD HAVE TALKED ALL NIGHT

19. (SBU) Editor-in-Chief of "Respublika" Oksana Makushina asked, "What do you say to Prime Minister Masimov who says that your companies who have invested here must place their money in Kazakhstani banks?" The Ambassador responded, "Deputy Prime Minister Orynbayev and Minister of Finance Zhamishev told me in our recent meetings that foreign companies will not be subject to this proposed regular; it is targeted at one specific major sector of the economy" (ref B). After 90 minutes, the journalists still wanted to continue

the interview indefinitely, asking the Ambassador, who was scheduled to depart to host an Iftaar dinner with Kazakh-language journalists (septel), if he could just answer a few more questions. The Ambassador compromised, agreeing to accept, and respond to, additional questions in writing.

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT: The group's intense interest in talking with the Ambassador for as long as possible shows the independent and opposition media's desire to work with the U.S. government to convey their points of view to Kazakhstani leaders. Post used the event to communicate our message; we are trying to encourage Kazakhstan to develop more freedom the media, not just as a form of "window-dressing" before its Chairmanship-in-Office, but to improve good governance and build a pragmatic, long-term partnership with the government of Kazakhstan. END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND